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SUBJECT Interview with Admiral Stansfield Turner

LARRY KING: Terrorism, hijacking, spies. That's the topics tonight on the Larry King: Let's Talk edition here on Channel 7. Our special guest is Admiral Stansfield Turner, the former Director of the CIA.

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KING: And our special tonight, Admiral Stansfield Turner, the former Director of the CIA, who next June a most revealing book will be published by Mr. Turner, Admiral Turner on lots of things. But we'll cover some things current, right on top of things.

What is your analysis, off the top, of that whole event with that hijacking?

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Larry, it's tough to know whether the Iranian government was really behind this. It's too early to accuse them of that, though there are some suspicious signs. There are terrorists in the Middle East who seem intent on doing in the United States, one way or the other. And this had a very anti-American flavor when they picked up that aircraft. They obviously were trying to get their own buddies out of Kuwait, where they have participated in an anti-, or at least partially anti-American terrorist act some months ago.

So I think it's an anti-American terrorist group. They took advantage of getting into Teheran, where they'd have a more sympathetic background, if it wasn't a collaborative effort with the Iranian government.

So we were caught in the middle. It's a tough

situation.

KING: If it was, that would have been pretty elaborate planning, though, wouldn't it, Iran? Wait a number of days, fake it like you're someone coming to clean up the plane. I mean that would have been -- that's pretty good planning.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes, but the suspicion is, first, that Iran has harbored and trained terrorists. We're quite sure of that. Second, that, you know, the Iranians demanded the release of those same people from Kuwait. And thirdly, when they did go to get into that airplane, somehow, nobody got hurt. They subdued the four terrorists and the terrorists weren't shot.

Now, I'm basing it on the best information that seems to be available this evening. In a week or two, when we get more facts, maybe some of this will be laid aside.

KING: Is there anything we could have done during this?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, I don't think so. Had it been almost any other country in the world, we might well have offered to send in one of our own rescue teams. You have to have a friendly reception in this kind of a circumstance because you've got to sneak up surreptitiously to the aircraft. We couldn't have gone in and captured the Iranian airport and then rescued the hostages. That would have been too much.

KING: Is there any, Admiral, defense against terrorism beyond Israel's, which says, "A terrorist act against even civilians makes them military. We'll never talk to you, and we're just going to go in and get them out. Or whoever dies, dies"?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Sure there is, Larry. Look, in the United States we don't have any serious hijacking problem anymore. Why? Because you and I stand in line and they check us pretty carefully at our airports. Somebody didn't check this airplane before it took off from Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, just across the Persian Gulf from Iran.

Sure there's a defense. Look at what's happened in West Germany. They had a terrible problem a few years ago with the Baader-Meinhof Gang. Look what's happened in Italy. They captured and killed a former Prime Minister, Aldo Moro, the terrorists did, the Red Brigades, so-called. Those are both under control. Why? Because those countries took it seriously. They put out a dragnet operation and they got all the little clues of information they could about the Baader-Meinhof or the Red Brigades. They've paid a price, just as you and I pay a price every time we go to an airport.

KING: How is the CIA involved?

ADMIRAL TURNER: The CIA is very active, I assume -- it certainly was in my day, but I have not reason to think it isn't just as active today -- in trying to find out what's going on with international terrorism. It's not an easy proposition.

First of all, there are lots of terrorist groups, and some of them just pop up today and disappear tomorrow. But, Larry, most of them are real fanatics. And if you want to try to find out what's going on in a fanatic organization, you've got to find somebody who looks like a fanatic to meld in with them. It's tough to find somebody. It's tough to have him be persuasive enough to get on the inside. And then when he's there, he's at considerable risk himself, too, if they find out any hint that he's working with the CIA.

It's done. I've seen it done. And it can be very successful. It can thwart a terrorist operation. But it's not easy. And we are naive if we think we're going to be able to stop all terrorism against the United States with just the CIA.

KING: You've seen it done. In other words, the CIA successfully infiltrated terrorist groups and prevented terrorism from occurring by the nature of the infiltration.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I can't give you any details.

KING: I realize that.

ADMIRAL TURNER: But I can guaranty you that I saw terrorist plans frustrated as a result of CIA efforts.

KING: All right.. Now, how do you deal with a Qaddafi, a man who promotes terrorism, state terrorism? We had that sting operation a couple weeks ago, the Egyptian thing. From a CIA standpoint -- I guess that's the easiest one to deal with him, if there's any. You can't deal with him openly -- how do you deal with that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, you can try to get inside his organization and understand where he's moving next, and then thwart it. That's a tough proposition.

I think the way we've got to deal with Qaddafi is for the United States to assume more open leadership. We've got to try to galvanize responsible nations around the world to make Qaddafi a pariah, when it's proven that he's done things like attempt assassinations in Egypt.

KING: And hire people.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Hire people all over the world. It's happened in our country, where he attempted it. The incident in Great Britain, where his people killed a policewoman. Just unforgivable.

We've got to say we're going to cordon this man off. I would, for instance, not let any American airliner, or try to get the whole international airline association to stop flying to Libya, deny him that privilege, that opportunity; and don't give his planes landing rights anywhere else until we've got evidence that this kind of thing stops.

KING: But we do business with him, do we not?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, I don't think so.

KING: No oil? The Americans are out of there.

ADMIRAL TURNER: The Americans are out. A lot of our European allies are in. The French are big in buying oil there.

KING: So you're saying use our clout with our friends and others to pressure him.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Sure. Nobody needs to buy oil from Libya today. There's plenty of oil to be had. It's a little inconvenience. It might even be a little expense for people to get rid of Libyan oil and try Nigerian or something else. But the Nigerians would love to sell it, and we'd rather have them buy it -- we'd rather put the money in Nigeria than Libya.

KING: How about the move of faking him out with a sting operation?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I think that was a clever one, and I think that kind of thing is important to let the world really have evidence of what a scoundrel he is.

KING: The other side. Do you fear if you cordon off a fanatic, a true fanatic, you leave him nothing left but more fanaticism?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I don't think there's any way you can make Qaddafi more fanatic. He's almost a nut right now. So, no, I'm not too worried about that.

KING: Not worried that if you cordoned him off it wouldn't make him worse. You know, the man with the back to the building does anything.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think he's about as worse as he can get, Larry.

KING: How good are we in infiltration, in the whole spying game? How would you rate the CIA?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I'd rate us very good, very good. It's a subjective evaluation.

Most people try to compare us with the Soviets, the KGB. The Soviets do a lot more in terms of human intelligence effort, penetration, putting spies out. I'm never sure why because they can either hear it on the Larry King Show or read it in Aviation Week, if we have any secrets in this country. They all seem to come out in the public, unfortunately.

But seriously, they do a great effort. They put a tremendous amount of time and money. For instance, a few weeks ago we arrested a pair of Soviets and an American FBI officer on the West Coast as an alleged spy effort. Did you read that those two Soviets had been in this country 11 years? One of them, the man, was a butcher. And the lady, I think, was a nurse. And I believe they'd been living here for 11 years to build up a position from which they could work as spies. You see what I mean? Patience.

KING: Don't we do the reverse? Haven't we got people 11, 12, 13 years in Eastern Europe?

ADMIRAL TURNER: It's pretty hard to get any American to live for 11 or 12, 13 years as a butcher in Bulgarian. Now, we don't have to operate that way because I think we're more clever than the Soviets. We don't have as big a human intelligence effort as they. I was trying to compare the two. And I'd say theirs is much bigger, but ours is more clever. I mean they've been arrested just recently several times here. And we get arrested once in a while too. But I believe that our human intelligence effort is satisfying our needs as well as theirs is satisfying theirs.

KING: One of the great problems in this whole game is we don't know our good things. In other words, the CIA, under you, yesterday, may have thwarted a major terrorist bombing. No credit. The guy who did it doesn't even get his name up on the board at the CIA building. Right?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I gave away, or gave out a lot of medals, Larry, for people who did very commendable things, sometimes heroic things. A good many of those medals I gave out in a small room, like, say, my own office, with six or seven people there to know about it, because that's all who could know that this person was even doing something that warranted praise. Sometimes a lot of people in the agency could be there for a public medal -- almost a public medal ceremony. But sometimes

no. You have to keep the whole operation secret, almost forever.

KING: In a country that abhors secrecy -- the United States doesn't like secrecy.

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's correct.

KING: We have Freedom of Information Acts. We want our people to be open. Right?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes.

KING: A Soviet agent -- it's probable that a Soviet agent is watching us now.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I would think so.

KING: The odds are in favor of it. Right?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes.

KING: The reverse couldn't be true in Moscow, could it?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No.

KING: The head of their KGB is not on television talking and answering questions that he doesn't know, prepared in advance, with an American watching. So you start two steps behind. Right?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. But that's the strength of our country, freedom of expression. That's one of the things we stand for most is that we have the right to say what we want to say.

KING: Is it a delicate balance, then, when you're Director of the CIA and you're committed to the Bill of Rights, and by nature you have to lie, don't you?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Never lied.

KING: Agents lie.

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's another thing. But when you're talking about the Director, who lives here in the United States and deals in the United States, I would not tolerate lying inside our organization or to our Congress or to our public.

Now, sometimes you decline to answer. I've fenced one or two of your questions on this show because they can't be answered within the safety of our country.

KING: But lie, never.

ADMIRAL TURNER: But lie, never. That's my view. We cannot lie. And I don't want to go to jail for lying to the Congress, or something like that.

KING: We'll be right back.

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KING: Let's stay with this secrecy thing here for a moment. It is a tender line, isn't it, a thin line?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. Secrecy is an anathema in a government that operates on the consent of the governed. Because if the governed don't know what's going on, they can't give their consent.

Now, what we found out in the mid-1970s was that secrecy had been abused by the CIA. Not too much, but enough that it was soundly criticized. And the point was that because of all that criticism, human intelligence activities were really at a very low pace when I happened to join the CIA in 1977. Why? Because the professionals didn't want to get caught out again and bring on more criticism, and maybe undo their whole agency.

So what I'm saying, Larry, is in 30 years with no supervision, no accountability, human intelligence had sort of round to a halt. So what did we do? We brought in some accountability. We brought in some supervision. It started under Gerald Ford and George Bush, when he was Director of the CIA. And it started when in 1976 the Senate established a committee on intelligence, and the House followed in 1977. So we've got a compromise now.

Yes, the public cannot know these secrets, even though they are the ones who have to consent to the government. But what we do is we let the House and the Senate Intelligence Committees know the secrets of intelligence, and they act as surrogates for you and me and the public.

KING: It would be wonderful if a free society didn't need this, wouldn't it?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No.

KING: No?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Because when people aren't held accountable, they make mistakes. If you're not going to be held accountable for what you say on this show, you may be a little

less judicious in how you handle yourself. I mean we're all like that. It's just human nature. And therefore I believe even people doing secret work have to be held accountable. Because in a democracy like ours, if they do make mistakes, there are enough investigative reporters around that it's going to come out.

KING: The danger. When an organization is secret, it can do a lot of things, even with all the oversights. So the CIA could be doing something tomorrow against its charter, couldn't it? It's hard to find out.

ADMIRAL TURNER: No.

KING: Not hard?

ADMIRAL TURNER: If the two Intelligence Committees are persevering, there's no reason they can't find out.

Take all the trouble we're in today in Nicaragua. That's because, over time, it's all spilled out through those committees, because it's something they've looked into. They didn't look into it as aggressively, I believe, as they should have. And some of the errors, like this manual, weren't uncovered until -- the manual that advocated assassination --until too late, or later than they should have. But that's a learning process. We're still feeling our way into this whole surrogate oversight process.

So, I think we can have both the necessary secrecy, because we limit those secrets to a few people in the White House and on Capitol Hill, and yet we can have enough check to avoid a repetition of the abuses of the past.

KING: How far should we go? Would you -- if you were the head of the CIA today and I tell you I can get a guy into Libya who will assassinate Qaddafi, would you sign off on it?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, I couldn't sign off on it. President Gerald Ford wrote the first presidential executive order on intelligence in February 1976 and he said no one in the government will participate in or conspire to assassinate anybody. President Carter reaffirmed that. President Reagan has reaffirmed that, also.

I believe it's a good rule. I don't think we should decide who should live and who should not live, other than in war. And therefore to make that judgment that it's a good idea to kill a Qaddafi, when you don't know who will come next, you don't know what kind of a moral judgment you're making, I don't think is a good move.

KING: How about teaching other people to kill?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well...

KING: When the CIA has manuals that tell other people how to tell and how to revolutionize.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think that was a bad manual, but it was not a manual on assassination. It was a manual on guerrilla warfare. And to that extent, it's a perfectly legitimate thing to help other people when you're engaging in guerrilla warfare. And one of the covert techniques for using the CIA in a situation like Nicaragua is to use paramilitary, we call it, support, training, military equipment -- to guerrillas who are fighting on the side of freedom.

KING: We're talking real world here, right?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes.

KING: Which is one of the difficult aspects of this. How do you get spies? How do you recruit spies? Who wants to be a spy? Can you give me a prototype of him or her?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, there's no single prototype. But you get some spies because they're fed up with their own country. They've been so oppressed. They've seen how corrupt their countries are, or how bad the ideology of Communism, in particular, is.

You get some spies purely for money. You get some spies because they establish a friendship with a CIA officer. He doesn't acknowledge, maybe, to be in the CIA, but they establish a friendship with this American and they become attached to him because he's a nice and a warm person.

Sometimes you get spies just because they want kicks, they want to have a thrill in life. Life is dull for them.

There are lots of different reasons, and some of them are psychotic.

KING: You weed them out? Or not necessarily?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Not necessarily. But you -- we have psychologists in the CIA who study all the spies that we engage.

KING: Really?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, yes. We psychoanalyze all of them. Now, can't usually lay them out on the couch, Larry, and have a

regular session. But we would give the psychologist all the data we could gather on this individual. It maybe his handwriting. It may be furtive conversations we've had with him in a back alley. Whatever we know about him, whatever we can collect about him. We turn it over to the psychologist, the shrink, and we say, "See what you can tell us about this person." And then as we learn more and more about him, we keep building up his dossier, and the psychologists keep looking at him, and they say, "Be a little wary. It sounds like he may be a double agent. He's not really as persuasive as he's trying to be." That is, that he wants to work for us. His reasons don't sound valid.

It's fascinating.

KING: Do you feel we've had Kim Philbys here, or Kim Philbys, the English double agent, here, a type here? Wilson was one?

ADMIRAL TURNER: We don't -- no.

KING: No, Wilson was after, and that was mercenary.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. And Wilson, as far as we know, didn't just go out giving secrets to the Soviet Union. He was trying to make money for himself."

KING: Could we have a Philby?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, we've had some Philbys, but on a much lower level. The British have had Mcleans and Philbys and Burgesses and other people who have been at a pretty high level and stayed there for a long period of time. And that was very, very costly.

During my time in the CIA, a man named Barnett, who had been a CIA person, left the CIA, and later on we found he had turned coat and was giving information to the Soviets. But he was not a big wheel.

KING: Admiral Stansfield Turner. I'm Larry King. We'll be right back.

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KING: You miss the power?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, you miss the excitement of being in on what's going on around the world and what the country's involved in. But, Larry, I don't miss the pressure. I like to go home tonight and know that I don't really have to read until one or two o'clock in the morning in order to be ready for

tomorrow, not to be embarrassed tomorrow, like if I went up on Capitol Hill and had to testify, or something.

KING: You don't want that phone call at 2:00 A.M. in the morning.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I've had enough of that.

KING: But that's a high too, isn't it?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, yes. You get a great kick out of that when it's happening. But I'm glad it's over.

KING: A lot of years of it is enough.

Thank you, Stan.